

Note: For the full statements referred to here, follow the hyperlink at the first reference to each person. Statements are at the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee website. Senators Thomas, Graham and Lautenberg did not provide written statements

Senators Hear Testimony on Corps Backlog and Missions

On 16 May 2000, The Transportation and Infrastructure (T/I) Subcommittee of the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee received important testimony from the Department of the Army and the Corps as well as panel of distinguished non-Federal witnesses representing major Corps missions.

Subcommittee Chairman George V. [Voinovich](#) (R-OH) opened the hearing by explaining that his purpose was to create a backdrop for the Water Resources Development Act of 2000. He presented a detailed analysis of the Corps backlog concluding:

- Corps mission areas have increased dramatically especially in environmental restoration, FUSRAP and environmental infrastructure
- Real construction appropriations (1999\$) have been fallen from \$5 billion in 1966 to about \$1.6 billion in the 1990s.
- The result: A huge backlog of 500 active projects with a remaining Federal cost of about \$38 billion

Senator Voinovich asked, "What should be done?" and offered some possible solutions:

- More money: "I think a doubling of current construction appropriations would be appropriate."
- Control "mission creep:" "Second I think we need to control the mission creep of the Corps." He pointed prominently to environmental infrastructure.
- Assure an open planning process

Full EPW Chairman Bob [Smith](#) (R-NH) shared Senator Voinovich's concerns about the number of projects that have been authorized but have not received funding. He was disturbed to see inadequate funds in the FY 2001 budget to meet the Nation's demands for Corps services. He strongly supported the expanding role of the Corps in environmental restoration.

Praising the Corps, Senator Christopher [Bond](#) (R-MO) noted, "The Corps has always been very responsive and worked hard to try to balance the difficult and often competing issues that land on your desk. ... The future of the Corps is critical to my state and this nation. The record of the Corps in terms of flood damage prevented, lives saved, economic development and other national benefits speaks for itself. To understand the broad bipartisan support for the mission of the Corps one must only look at the programs and projects authorized and funded by this Congress..." Bond, himself an Army veteran, also criticized recent attacks on military leaders of the Corps and said, "People who have distinguished records of military service, who are decorated for their honor and sacrifice and who served tours in Vietnam and Desert Storm, deserve the presumption of innocence and deserve more respect..."

Senator Craig Thomas (R-WY) emphasized his view that there should be more use of the private sector. He also raised concerns about competing with the private sector in the support for others program.

Senator Bob Graham (D-FL) praised the transformation of the Corps of Engineers in dealing with the public and the environment. He was especially complimentary of the Jacksonville District. Some of Senator Graham's key points were: the need to set tight standards for project authorization; a process for setting priorities for projects; and need to eliminate unneeded or outdated projects. He asked Corps to develop a set of standards to evaluate previously authorized projects to determine if need to be modified or deauthorized.

Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) made a brief statement in support of the Corps of Engineers. He noted the major cause of the backlog is inadequate Federal funding in an era of budget surplus. He noted that many Congresses have asked the Corps to do many missions.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) Claudia L. [Tornblom](#) and Major General Hans A. Van Winkle, Deputy Commanding General for Civil Works, appeared before the Subcommittee. In a strong analytic statement, Ms Tornblom presented a detailed discussion of the Corps construction backlog, water resources trends and challenges and the Civil Works strategic plan current in preparation. She concluded, “we feel strongly that the nation faces significant and demanding challenges in dealing with those [water resource] needs. We also know the Corps has any unique assets from which to draw in tackling those challenges.”

Mr. J. Ron [Brinson](#), President and CEO of the Port of New Orleans, was the first witness on the non-Federal panel and testified on behalf the National Waterways Conference and the American Association of Port Authorities. Mr. Brinson gave a detailed statement emphasizing the critical importance of the Corps navigation mission to competitiveness in world trade and our economic prosperity. He also noted that declining civil works and construction general appropriations “have conspired to create an incredible backlog of Corps of Engineers civil works projects in all categories. The navigation function, particularly on the inland system, has been acutely affected. ... All the while, the locks and dams and capital stock are aging and deteriorating.” “We must push forward on river infrastructure – now.”

While unable to attend as anticipated, Mr. George [Gruggett](#), Executive Vice President, Mississippi Valley Flood Control Association, presented a written statement documenting the critical importance of the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project and expressing concern over a proposal to revise the Principles and Guidelines. “I request that you reject these changes. This is in the best interest of millions of citizens whose very lives, as well as their livelihoods, depend on a sound, balanced approach to solving water resources problems. Such an approach is already in place with current guidelines and the Corps management structure. We need the national will and determination to face them. The Nation’s future depends on it.”

Mr. Scott [Faber](#), Senior Director for Public Policy, American Rivers appeared on behalf of several environmental interest groups. Mr. Faber noted, “Corps of Engineers projects have produced significant benefits for the nation, including many navigation and flood control projects, and the Corps has played an indispensable role in the repair of many of the nation’s environmentally degraded waterways.” But Mr. Faber also recommended a program of improvements to the Corps process including better estimates of costs and benefits, independent review, adequate mitigation, meeting national priorities, expanding the Corps restoration mission and restoring the rivers of Lewis and Clark.

Mr. Tony B. [MacDonald](#), Executive Director of the Coastal States Organization documented the importance of the Corps to the management of our nation’s coasts including navigaiton, shore protection, environmental protection and restoration. He also offered solutions to address the current backlog “There are three simple answers, although hard choices, to meeting the over \$30 billion backlog of authorized projects. (1) Increased funding for the Corps; (2) Find and establish efficiencies in planning, designing, constructing and maintaining projects; and (3) Carefully work with local project sponsors to review the backlog and to assess current need for projects as authorized.”

Mr. William [Parrish](#), Vice President, Association of State Flood Plain Managers, Inc. and State Flood Plain Manager, State of Maryland, testified, “The federal government has a key role to play in helping to reduce flood damage, but that role has changed and evolved from what it was 30 to 60 years ago.” He strongly supported local solutions to flooding, non-structural measures and flood plain management. He praised the Corps Planning Assistance to States and Flood Plain Management Services programs and the new Challenge XXI program. “The Federal government would facilitate local development of flood loss reduction strategies and offer incentives for wise decision-making.”

At the conclusion of the non-Federal panel testimony, Senator Voinovich challenged the witnesses to get together and discuss their differences and promised to hold a follow-up hearing in several months to determine if they had made progress on issues.